Agents concerned profession is getting a bad name

By Chris Mortensen Staff Writer

-LOS ANGELES - The irony did not pass without a laugh. While more than 30 sports agents conferred Friday, in the very next room a meeting was under way for the Committee of Professional Responsibility and Conduct by the State Bar of California.

The conduct and professional responsibility of sports agents has been increasingly under fire in recent months.

New York-based agents Norby Denver. Walters and Lloyd Bloom, who have admitted giving cash to numerous business ... support state legislacollege athletes with eligibility re- tion," is what Chicago-based agent maining, are the targets of an ongo- Steve Zucker has written to numering federal grand jury investigation ous colleges around the country. in Chicago. Because of that investiis going through a severe image the ambulance got there."

now said Ralph Cindrich, a Pitts- this year who represents two firstburgh-based sports attorney and round NFL choices, Clemson run-

agent. "The public perception of agents is extremely low."

"There are good agents, but the bad ones are getting the headlines," said Leigh Steinberg, who serves on the NFL players union's agent advisory board. "I don't think there is any question that the business is going through a crisis. But hopefully we'll be stronger because of the crisis."

"I'm sure it's getting to the point where it's almost embarrassing for somebody to admit that they're an agent," said Jack Mills of

"It's time to clean up our

gation and numerous lawsuits in- this business who make it bad, just volving agents in recent months, like for a long time the image of a many of the agents who attended lawyer was bad; not just because so Friday's NFL Players Association many lawyers were chasing the ammeeting agreed that their business bulance, but some showed up before

"I think, justifiably, the image ren is blaring loudly amid a flurry is bad," said David Ware, an Atlan- of lawsuits filed by players against ta-based sports attorney and an agents, agents against players and agents against agents.

Francisco 49ers) and Florida wide receiver Ricky Nattiel (Denver Broncos). Flagler and Ware are named as

Ricky Nattiel

defendants in a breach-of-contract lawsuit Walters and Bloom have rupt Organizations) Act against the Ware and others believe the si- filed in New York. Walters and Bloom contend Flagler accepted money from them and signed a representation contract while playing at Clemson — violations of NCAA "It all seems to be coming out Ware is one of the few agents rules — and later reneged on the contract. Ware said he believes Flagler and many other athletes



Leigh Steinberg

Said Ware: "There are people in ning back Terrence Flagler (San were taken advantage of by Walters

The federal grand jury in Chicago is considering possible charges of fraud, extortion and violation of the RICO (Racketeering Influenced Coragents. Walters and Bloom have admitted breaking NCAA rules, but

say they have broken no laws. "The kids (from lower-income families) are the ones who are being sought (by Walters and Bloom) and those players are more susceptible to the fast-talk, fast-buck pressure sales pitch," said Ware. "Anybody who would prey on that situation leaves a very bad taste in your mouth."

Ware says there are "competent and conscientious" agents, but he said few now receive trust from the public or players.

"I feel the real crisis we're going through is that it makes your clients suspicious," said Ware. "Even the players you know well, they read so much going on that there is a natural suspicion. We've got to clean up our image and restore the confidence of the players. There is an absolute lack of trust."

Ware estimates that more than 50 percent of NFL players drop their original agent for a variety of reasons. He said colleges and professional sports need to do a better job of educating the athlete about agents. The NFL players union says that if a college player wants information on an agent he should call the union.

"My suggestion to any player is try, be that an accountant, a stockbroker, a financial planner or an attorney," said Ware. "People in those businesses can lose their licenses, or they can be disbarred for a number of violated regulations.

"And most of those people are

covered by some form of malpractice insurance. I know if somebody took me for \$250,000 I would want to recover all or most of that. If you get a guy who one day is a car salesman and the next day he's your agent, and he's done something wrong, all you are going to get is what he owns, and you may not get

Cindrich noted that it is not difficult to become certified as an agent by the NFL players union. The requirements for certification include a \$200 initial fee and a resume that may or may not be thoroughly checked.

"What you have is a hodgepodge of attorneys, accountants, bankers and a lot of laymen who have no training or discipline in this particular business," said Cindrich. "It is that layman, the undisciplined, inexperienced group, that is having a lot of these problems."

The NFL players union has become more aggressive in recent months. One unidentified agent has to get someone to represent you been de-certified and several are who is already in a regulated indus- under investigation, including Bloom. An agent cannot represent an NFL player unless he is certified by the union.

> "I can assure you that we are closely scrutinizing the process in which an agent is certified," said Mark Murphy, a union executive.

Black players victims of 'numbers' game — you can look it up

Atlanta Braves vice president Hank "Aaron is major-league baseball's only black with an executive position. Why? Well, Al "They lack the necessities" Campanis gave his reasons from sea to shining sea on national television.

So thanks to Mr. Campanis, who deserved a special citation during this week's NAACP convention in New York City, we have some Americans wondering why less than two percent of the game's front-office employees are black. We're talking front-office employees who range from general managers to secretaries. Then there is the lack of black managers. There have been only three in majorleague history, none currently, and they managed for a composite 7½ seasons, six by Frank Robinson.

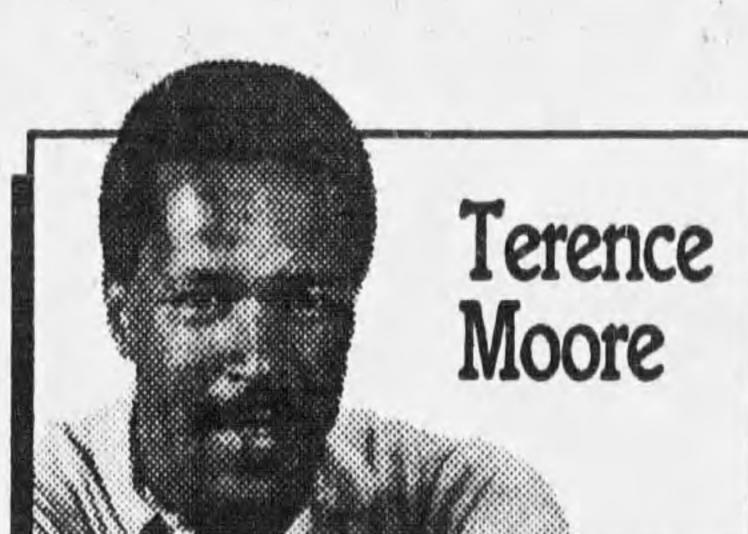
Let's forget all that for a moment to consider the strange plight of blacks between major-league foul lines. First, there are few black players these days. Second, most black players are outfielders and first basemen. Third, few black players are allowed to be less than great for long. Fourth, the number of black players in the

majors is declining.

Since Al Campanis is unavailable for comment, here is our explanation: There are those in the majors who not only have sought to slow the progress of blacks since Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier 40 years ago, but who have sought to reverse the progress.

We'll start with some curious numbers. According to research by Richard Lapchick, director of The Center For The Study Of Sports In Society, 22 of the 26 major-league teams have no more than seven blacks on their current 24-man rosters. His study shows that there are only 102 black players out of the 624 players (16 percent) in the majors.

"You would expect that if there is a random number of blacks in the game that there would be 50 percent on one team, 10 percent on another, that the numbers would vary tremendously," Lapchick said this week on ABC-TV's "Good Morning America" show. "That's not the case. In fact, statistically, the number of blacks on each team is about right on the



The Braves have four black players. Three are outfielders (Ken Griffey, Dion James and Albert Hall), one is a first baseman (Gerald Perry). It figures. According to Lapchick, of the 102 blacks in the majors, 68 are outfielders and nine are first basemen. That's 76 percent. That's enough to make us recall a statement by Joe Morgan, a future Hall of Fame second baseman: "When I first came into the league with Houston in the early 1960s, people in the organization kept telling me to grab a glove and go out there in center field with those other black players. I told them, 'Forget it. I'm here to play second base.' That kind of thinking hasn't left baseball."

be thinking men positions, along with middle-infield positions, whereas the outfield break into the lineup." is for those perceived to have more brawn than brain. Consider, too, that Lapchick discovered that 32 percent of active black players have a lifetime batting average of more than .280. That compares to 11 percent for white players. Lapchick discovered also that 40 percent of active black pitchers have lifetime ERAs under 3.00. That compares to 11 percent for white

Former baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn offered the old-school reason for such numbers: "They are merely a tribute to the skills of the black athlete. I don't think it suggests anything about racism or

Such a philosophy doesn't explain why there are virtually no black utility men in the majors. Name four. Name a dozen in history. If a black player doesn't start, he doesn't stay around long. "When I came You can look it up.

Consider that Lapchick discovered that up, we felt we had to be two or three only 11 of the 231 major-league pitchers times better than everybody else," said (five percent) are black. He said the Frank Robinson, who began his big-league game's decision makers consider those to career with the Cincinnati Reds in 1956. "If you were good, you had to be better to

Little has changed. For every Jerry Royster in the majors, there are 20 Darryl Strawberrys. More interesting, the number of blacks in the majors is declining. We did a month-long survey on blacks in baseball five years ago for a San Francisco paper. Among other things, we discovered there were 144 blacks in the majors in 1973. That's 24 percent (based on 24 teams and 25-man rosters at the time). In 1982, there were 129 blacks in the majors (based on 26 teams and 25-man rosters at the time). That's 20 percent. Now the percentage of blacks in the majors is 16

If teams can conspire not to sign free agents, which has been the case over the past two winters, they can work in the shadows to limit the number of blacks in their front offices and in their clubhouses.

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